

thoroughly discredited. United Nations weapons inspectors, who were dismissed by the White House as being naive and ineffective, turned out to have gathered far better information with a tiny fraction of the budget of our own intelligence agencies.

We know the insurgency is continuing to grow along with American casualties—1,999 killed, and at least 15,220 wounded, many with crippling injuries, as of yesterday—despite the same old “light at the end of the tunnel” assertions and clichés by the White House and top officials in the Pentagon.

The sad but inescapable truth, which the President either does not see or refuses to believe or admit, is the Iraqi insurgency has steadily grown, in part because of, not in spite of, our presence there.

After baiting the insurgents to “bring them on,” as the President said, we got what the President asked for. More than 2 years later, the pendulum has swung against us and the question is no longer whether we can stop the insurgency; the question is how do we extricate ourselves.

According to soldiers who volunteered for duty in Iraq believing in the mission and who have returned home, many Iraqis who detest the barbaric tactics of the insurgents have also grown to despise us. They blame us for the lack of water and electricity, for the lack of jobs and health care, for the hardships and violence they are suffering day in and day out.

Unlike our troops and their families who are making great sacrifices every day, most Americans have been asked to sacrifice nothing for this war. In fact, we don’t pay the bills. The bills are being sent to our children and our grandchildren by way of our rapidly escalating national debt and annual deficits.

Yet as the hundreds of billions of dollars to pay for the war continue to pile up and domestic programs, such as Medicaid, job training, and programs for needy students, are cut, then the sacrifices are going to be felt as well.

Slogans have become little more than political rallying cries for the White House, slogans as empty and unfulfilled as “mission accomplished.” Our troops were sent to fight an unnecessary war without sufficient armor against these ruthless and barbaric bombing attacks, without adequate reinforcements, without a plan to win the peace, and without adequate medical care and other services when they return home on stretchers or crutches or with eye patches, unable to walk, to work, to pay their mortgages, or to support their families.

Many of our veterans have been treated shamefully by their Government when it sent them into harm’s way under false pretenses and again after they returned home.

Today I worry about places such as Ramadi, where more than 300 members of the Army National Guard from my

State of Vermont are currently serving valiantly alongside their comrades in the Marine Corps and the Pennsylvania National Guard. Dozens of other citizen soldiers from the Vermont Guard are serving across Iraq, while hundreds more are deployed throughout the Persian Gulf region.

Many Vermonters have been killed in Ramadi and elsewhere by roadside bombs and all-too-accurate sniper attacks. The insurgents too often seem to attack and then escape with impunity. You can actually open newspapers and see photos of armed insurgents walking the streets of Iraq in broad daylight.

Many of these cold-blooded attacks are by people who are willing to trade their own lives to kill civilians, security guards, and our soldiers who now have no way of knowing whom they can trust among the general population.

The President has no plan to deal with Ramadi, let alone the rest of Iraq, except doing more of what we have been doing for more than 2 years at a cost of \$5 billion a month—money we don’t have and that future generations of Americans are going to have to repay. Nor has he proposed a practical alternative to our wasteful energy policy that guarantees our continued dependence on Persian Gulf oil for decades to come.

I am sure that what our military is doing to train the Iraqi Army and what our billions upon billions of dollars are doing to help rebuild Iraq—whatever is not stolen or wasted by profiteering contractors—is making a difference. Iraq is no longer governed by a corrupt, ruthless dictator, and there have been halting but important steps toward representative government.

I applaud the Iraqis who courageously stood in long lines to cast a ballot for a new constitution, despite the insurgents’ threats. There are many profiles in courage among the Iraqi people, just as there are in the heroic and daily endeavors of United States soldiers there.

But this progress masks deeper troubles and may be short lived, threatened by a widening insurgency and a divisive political process that is increasingly seen as leading to a Shiite-dominated theocracy governed by Islamic law and aligned with Iran, or the dissolution of Iraq into separate Kurdish, Sunni, and Shiite states.

Mr. President, this war has been a costly disaster for the United States of America. More than half of the American people now say they have lost confidence in the President’s handling of it.

Far from making us safer from terrorists, in fact, it has turned Iraq into a haven and recruiting ground for terrorists and deflected our attention and resources away from the fight against terrorism. If anything, it has emboldened our enemies, as it has become increasingly apparent that the most powerful army in the world cannot stop a determined insurgency.

Regrettably, it is no longer a secret how vulnerable we are. Hurricane Katrina showed how tragically unprepared we are to respond to a major disaster 4 years after 9/11 and after wasting billions of dollars on an unnecessary war.

Our cities are little further than the drawing board when it comes to developing workable evacuation plans for a terrorist attack or other emergency, not to mention how to feed, house, and provide for millions of displaced persons.

This war has caused immense damage to our relations with the world’s Muslims, a religion practiced by some 1.2 billion people, about which most Americans know virtually nothing. We cannot possibly mount an effective campaign against terrorism without the trust, respect, and the active support of Muslims, particularly in the Middle East where our image has been so badly damaged. Our weakened international reputation is another heavy price our country has paid for this war.

Each day, as more and more Iraqi civilians, often children, lose their lives and limbs from suicide bombers and also from our bombs, the resentment and anger toward us intensifies. And every week, the number of U.S. service men and women who are killed or wounded creeps higher and will soon pass 2,000, but, even more tragically, shows no sign of diminishing.

This war has isolated us from our allies, most of whom want no part of it, and if we continue on the course the President has set, it will also divide our country.

Other Senators and Representatives, Republicans and Democrats, have expressed frustration and alarm with the President’s failure to acknowledge that this war has been a costly mistake, that more of the same is not a workable policy, and that we need to change course. My friend Senator HAGEL, a Vietnam veteran, has pointed out the increasing similarities to Vietnam. We learned this week that the administration has even resumed the discredited Vietnam-era practice of measuring progress by reporting body counts.

White House and Pentagon officials and their staunchest supporters in Congress warn of a wider civil war if we pull our troops out. They could be right. In fact, it could be the first thing they have been right about since the beginning of this reckless adventure.

My question to them is: When and how then do we extract ourselves from this mess? What does the President believe needs to happen before our troops can come home? What is his plan for getting to that point?

If we cannot overcome the insurgency, what can we realistically expect to accomplish in Iraq—and at what cost—that requires the continued deployment of our troops? What is it that compels us to spend billions of dollars to rebuild the Iraqi military when our own National Guard is stretched to the breaking point and cannot even get the money for the equipment it needs?